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# PART ONE

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## *MOZART'S RHYTHMIC TOPOI*

— There is, continued my father, a certain mien and motion of the body and all its parts, both in acting and speaking, which argues a man *well within*; and I am not at all surprised that Gregory of Nazianzum, upon observing the hasty and untoward gestures of Julian, should foretell he would one day become an apostate; — or that St. Ambrose should turn his *Amanuensis* out of doors, because of an indecent motion of his head, which went backwards and forwards like a flail; — or that Democritus should conceive Protagoras to be a scholar, from seeing him bind up a faggot, and thrusting, as he did it, the small twigs inwards. — There are a thousand unnoticed openings, continued my father, which let a penetrating eye at once into a man's soul; and I maintain it, added he, that a man of sense does not lay down his hat in coming into a room, — or take it up in going out of it, but something escapes, which discovers him.

— Lawrence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, vol. 6, chap. 5.

## CHAPTER ONE

### *The Shapes of Rhythms*

#### *Meter, Dance, and Expression*

It should not come as a surprise, in light of what has been said, that meters can in themselves possess affects. Although meter is an element of music which in general we consider as merely a handy temporal measure (beneath the threshold of expressive values), a meter is usually the first choice a composer makes, and all signs indicate that in the late eighteenth century that choice amounted to the demarcation of an expressive limit. One finds in glancing through the writings of late eighteenth-century theorists that a description of the expressive qualities of meters is regularly included in discussions of how to "paint the passions":

Tempo in music is either fast or slow, and the division of the measure is either duple or triple. Both kinds are distinguished from each other by their nature and by their effect, and their use is anything but indifferent as far as the various passions are concerned. . . .

Composers rarely offend in this matter [the affects of various tempos], but more often against the special nature and quality of various meters; since they often set in 4/4 what by its nature is an *alla breve* or 2/4 meter. With 6/8 meter the same confusions occur often enough, even with well-known composers, and in cases where they cannot use as an excuse the constraint occasionally placed upon them by the poet. Generally many composers appear to have studied the tenets of meter even less than those of period structure, since the former is cloaked in far less darkness than the latter.<sup>1</sup>

Music is based on the possibility of making a row of notes which are indifferent in themselves, of which not one expresses anything autonomously, into a speech of the passions. . . .

[Meter's role in the "speech of the passions":] The advantages of subdividing triple and duple meter into various meters with longer or shorter notes for the main beats are understandable; for from this each meter obtains its own special tempo, its own special weight in performance, and consequently its own special character also.<sup>2</sup>

But it is clear from the little I have said here about the different characters of meters that this variety of meters is very suitable for the expression of the shadings of the passions.

That is, each passion has its degrees of strength and, if I may thus express it, its deeper or shallower impression. . . . The composer must before all things make clear to himself the particular impression of the passion he is to portray, and then choose a heavier or lighter meter according to the affect in its particular shading, which requires one or the other.<sup>3</sup>

It makes sense that meter — the classification of the number, order, and weight of accents — should take on an important role in an aesthetic which connects emotion with motion. Since meter is the prime orderer of the *Bewegung* or movement, its numbers are by no means neutral and lifeless markers of time, but a set of signs designating a corresponding order of passions, and meant in execution to stir their hearers directly by their palpable emanations in sound. The composer can study the shapes of meters to learn their potential for expression, he can manipulate them, but he did not invent them.

Yet it is frequently assumed that this notion, although a signal principle of the *Affektenlehre* theories of the early part of the century, had dropped out of fashion by the late 1700s, at the same time as the number of time signatures in use had declined and qualifying adjectives were being more frequently employed at the head of a movement to indicate the proper tempo — and character — of the work.<sup>4</sup> In the face of this opinion it is striking that late eighteenth-century theorists' discussions of rhythm and meter remained as detailed as those of their counterparts earlier in the century;<sup>5</sup> accounts of the subject in lexicons, manuals, and treatises spelled out carefully the individual configurations of each time signature in current use and of many which had fallen into disuse.<sup>6</sup> J. P. Kirnberger's classification ran to twenty-eight meters,<sup>7</sup> and Carlo Ger-vasoni, writing around the turn of the century, still treated under separate headings as many as sixteen.<sup>8</sup>

Kirnberger sketches out the form he considers the discussion of any given meter should take, listing three main heads, the first two of which are especially relevant here (the third concerns the special case of the setting of texts):

1) That all kinds of meters discovered and in use up to now be described to [the composer], each according to its true quality and exact execution.

2) That the spirit or character of each meter be specified as precisely as possible.<sup>9</sup>

Most theorists' discussions tend to follow this sketch, with the result that the meters examined settle into a sort of affective spectrum, or gamut. Consider first the lower number of the time signature — the designator of the beat. From the beginnings of Western polyphony a particular note value has usually been tacitly considered to embody what I shall call the *tempo giusto*, the normal moderate pace against which are measured "faster" and "slower."<sup>10</sup> By the eighteenth century the *valore giusto* had become the quarter note and, insofar as there is a modern notion of *tempo giusto*, it remains so today. In eighteenth-century French music, for example, 3/4 was often expressed by the single symbol 3, presumably in recognition of its status as the normal or *tempo giusto* among triple meters.<sup>11</sup> A spectrum of meters is readily organized around the lower number of the time signature, radiating in each direction from the central number 4; both tempo and degree of accentuation are established by the relative duration of the note receiving the beat:

As far as meter is concerned, those of longer note values, such as *alla breve*, 3/2, and 6/4, have a heavier and slower movement than those of shorter note values, such as 2/4, 3/4, and 6/8, and these are less lively than 3/8 and 6/16. Thus for example a *Loure* in 3/2 is slower than a Minuet in 3/4, and this dance is again slower than a *Passepied* in 3/8.<sup>12</sup>

The meters written on the staff all indicate a particular performance. In meters, for example, with notes of long duration, execution must always be slow and sedate, in conformance with the large note values; but in meters with notes of only short duration a lighter execution is required, since these notes by their nature must be passed over quickly. Thus, independently of the degree of tempo, meters are regulated also by the various values of the notes.<sup>13</sup>

The quarter note, measuring the motion of a normal human stride, occupies the center of the spectrum. Meters in half notes (2) or whole notes (1, although rare, is mentioned in some treatises) fall to the left of center, requiring a slower tempo and a more solemn style of execution. To the right fall 8 and 16 (and, at the beginning of the century, 32) in ascending degrees of rapidity, lightness, and gaiety. Thus a geometric series of numbers from one to thirty-two corresponds to an ordered range of human strides from the slowest (and gravest) to the fastest (and gayest):

1   2   4   8   16   32  
 ← mean →

The affect projected by the meter is a direct consequence of the union of tempo and degree of accentuation:

Sorrow, humility, and reverence, require a slow movement, with gentle, easy inflections of the voice; but joy, thanksgiving, and triumph, ought to be distinguished by a quicker movement, with bolder inflexions, and more distant leaps, from one sound to another.<sup>14</sup>

And so the number exemplified by meter is viewed as a "passionate" number, capable of embodying the emotions and feelings of human beings in all their range and variety.

This ordering of affects by musical numbers was by no means an arbitrary or mystical numerology, for it corresponded to a like ordering of human motions or gestures. Music had turned away from its Renaissance preoccupation with the cosmic harmony of the sonorous numbers toward a new desire to move an audience through representations of its own humanity. Priority in music was claimed for the imaging of human affairs as over against the serene encompassment of a divinely numbered cosmos. Because of this change in music's role in the world from a theological to a sensory reflector, the metrical hierarchy was now based on physical movement, the province of the dance. Dance unites bearing and character in a measured and artful expression:

Clearly almost everything in the moral character of men can be expressed intelligibly and in a lively manner by the position and movement of the body. Dance in its way is as capable as music and speech of being modelled on the language of the soul and of the passions.<sup>15</sup>

In the dancer movement and affect become one. The repertory of conventional music for social dance — sarabandes, gavottes, and minuets, for example — naturally became one of the most important sources of *topoi* in the affective language of both Baroque and Classic music.

In fact it is the characteristic metrical usages of the social dance repertory that finally organize the upper number of the time signature into the metrical spectrum. The function of the upper number is of course to specify a triple or duple ordering of the beat which is represented by the lower number. Although, in the late Renaissance, dances were cast as much in duple as in triple meter, by the seventeenth century triple had become the meter most identified with dancing. At first tempi associated with triple meter were generally faster than those in duple. By the high Baroque, however, the noble and considered gestures of the folia and sarabande, although triple in structure, were set over the number 2 (the meter 3/2) at the slower end of the spectrum. Thus in the early eighteenth century, although the numerical series 2 4 8 16 32 had significance for tempi and execution, the duple and triple indications constituting the upper number of each time signature had no particular

attachment to either end of the spectrum: music was written in 3/2 as well as 3/8, or 2/8 and 4/16 as well as 6/8 and 9/16.

By the latter half of the century, however, Classic composers had made a final clarification of the attachments born by the numbers on the top — the triple and duple beat groupings. Writers of the period frequently returned to the early Baroque distinction between a slower duple and a quicker, more lively triple meter:

The different sorts of time have, in some degree, each their peculiar character. Common time is naturally more grave and solemn; triple time, more chearful [*sic*] and airy. And for this reason, it is generally agreed, that every mood of triple time ought to be performed something quicker, than the correspondent mood of common time; for instance, the measure in the slow triple of minims [3/2], ought to be made shorter than the measure in the slow common time [4/4], marked with a plain C; and the measure, in the triple of crotchets [3/4], should be shorter than the measure in the mood of the barred C [*alla breve*]; and so on.<sup>16</sup>

Meter also takes its place in expression. If it is a question of expressing great, solemn, and majestic matters, Common Time is the most suitable; Triple is best for expressing familiar things and ordinary ones. 2/4 has a character which is still lighter, and more humble. 6/8 serves only for expressions of the comic and the humorous, for pastorales, dances, and the like.<sup>17</sup>

In classifying meters writers often identified particular dances as the "natural movement" of a triple meter,<sup>18</sup> and at the same time considered the "natural seat" of duple meters, especially *alla breve*, to be in the church (or, concomitantly, in fugues and choruses).<sup>19</sup>

This classification of duple as an "ecclesiastical" meter can be explained by certain historical associations. Sacred music was by the late eighteenth century synonymous with certain musical practices which had come to be considered antique. Fuxian species counterpoint,<sup>20</sup> with its long-note *cantus firmi*, heavily accented and slow of tempo, was by virtue of its venerability judged most appropriate for the expressive requirements of music for worship. It was epitomized by copy-book exercises in duple measures of half and whole notes — "white-note"<sup>21</sup> or *alla breve* counterpoint. At the same time, in the sphere of dance music, dances with a markedly slow triple movement were less in evidence in both the dance hall and chamber and symphonic music: composers turned away from the courante with its 3/2 or 6/4 meter and complex rhythmic patterning, and began to take the sarabande at a tempo only slightly slower than the minuet, usually adopting a 3/4 meter in place of the 3/2 signature prevalent earlier in the century.<sup>22</sup> These changes pushed triple groupings over toward the quicker beats at the right of the spectrum. The result was a polarization of duple and triple meters — a

topical confrontation between the two metrical types which could be characterized as an opposition of divine and mundane subject matters. Not only did meter bear the stamp of human character: the various affects themselves were classified by two special types of human activity — the ecclesiastical and the choreographic.

The Classic style itself gravitated around these two poles, which took on a variety of names in their various manifestations: the learned (from its associations with "school" counterpoint), ecclesiastical, strict, or "bound" (*gebundener Stil*, *stile legato*, from its precise rules for dissonance treatment) at one extreme, and on the other, the *galant*, or free. The strict style had its ancestor in Renaissance and Baroque *alla breve* counterpoint, while the free style stemmed metrically and rhythmically to a great extent from the dance. The vehicle of Classic music most closely connected with the *style galant*, the "sonata allegro" or key-area plan,<sup>23</sup> had its origins in the simple symmetrical dance form. That highest of contrapuntal forms, the fugue, was associated principally with sacred music, and had the air of an importation when encountered in a sonata movement.<sup>24</sup> In the classification of affects inhering in meters, the duple rhythms of the learned style were reserved for expressions which were intended to have some connection with the ecclesiastical (an affect which was by no means banned from the "secular" sonata allegro, which reflected every facet of contemporary life in its imitations), while dance rhythms were regarded as the most direct and measurable means of portraying human passions in time. Many other types of gestures came in for their share of imitation in the *galant* vocabulary: the singing style, for example, horn calls, and the very habits of orchestral music themselves. Still the dance remained a central symbol of the human half of the eighteenth-century cosmos.

In fact, this simplifying and sharpening of contrasts in the metrical spectrum in the late eighteenth century may well have been a correlative of the emerging procedures of key-area or sonata-form composition. Composers of the high Baroque customarily explored one gesture in a movement, favoring a mono-affective style. Classic composers, on the other hand, preferred to bring into the frame of a single movement the bustle and contrast of a world in small, in a harmonic and affective "dialectic" set out in antecedent and consequent symmetries (or in the intentional breach thereof). One requirement for fulfilling this disposition to dialectic would be that the nature of the topical materials in question be clearly defined, and their relations to one another sharply and dramatically demarcated: for the listener to embrace the fact of the contrast, identification of the members involved in it must be swift and near-automatic.

But the subjects of Mozart's operas are not on the whole ecclesiasti-

cal; even the spectral Stone Guest, heaven's emissary in *Don Giovanni*, is vested in human form and arrives on foot. In secular music the left side of the spectrum served to choreograph those human passions which most resemble the divine. Danceable meters, although they are capable of expressing a broad range of passions, must stop short of the most exalted ones. When noble characters voice tragic or moral sentiments in the lofty couplets of *opera seria*, Mozart has them affect the ecclesiastical style in a gesture which still remains choreographic in an extended sense: let us admit it to the roster of *topoi* under the designation "exalted march," for it figures importantly in this catalogue of expressive devices.

To explain how the exalted march is an operatic extension of that style of music called learned or ecclesiastical, a comparison of a sample of each will suffice: for example, the last movement of Mozart's Quartet in G Major, K. 387, and Donna Anna's "Or sai chi l'onore" (*Don Giovanni*, I, 10).<sup>25</sup> The quartet movement opens with sixteen measures of an academic "fugue" in fifth-species counterpoint, which are answered by a contrasting *galant* cadential flourish (actually a contredanse, which would properly be scanned in 2/4). Although the movement is designated *Molto allegro*, the "white notes" of the counterpoint project one strong beat per measure, choreographing a slow, marked, and solemn stride, the tread of Aristotle's great-souled man;<sup>26</sup> *Molto allegro* is more appropriate to the misbarred contredanse (ex. 1-1). The text of Donna Anna's aria — her challenge to her fiancé Don Ottavio to punish Don Giovanni, her would-be seducer and the murderer of her father — is plainly material for the exalted style. Donna Anna, the one woman in *Don Giovanni* who is unquestionably of noble rank, adopts the white-note *alla breve* gesture for an aria in a grand, rather old-fashioned idiom. Unlike the quartet movement, "Or sai chi l'onore" is marked *Andante*, but each of its measures contains two beats or steps, while the quartet's *Molto allegro* measures, during the contrapuntal opening, each contain one (ex. 1-2). "Or sai chi l'onore," while not contrapuntal, imitates the same gesture as the more obviously learned and venerable species counterpoint of the quartet — music with two strong slow beats per measure and all other rhythmic action subordinated. Strides choreographed to the quartet's counterpoint and to Donna Anna's exalted march would be approximately coincident. The quartet movement is a scholium on the style of the aria, explicating in its textbook fugue the archaic and ultimately ecclesiastical sources of the *alla breve*.<sup>27</sup>

Modern designations for *alla breve* such as "cut time" and *doppio movimento*, and the attendant modern notions of *alla breve* as "faster than," appear to contradict the eighteenth-century account of 2/2 as the most *maestoso* of all meters,<sup>28</sup> "only useful for serious, heartfelt passions,"<sup>29</sup>

## Example 1-1

Molto allegro

Violino I  
Violino II  
Viola  
Violoncello & Contrabasso

Donna Anna

Or sai chi lo

"suitable for sacred song on account of its weighty slow tempo."<sup>30</sup> Some eighteenth-century writers shared the confusion, for instance Scheibe, who complained about the recent habit of using *alla breve* in quicker tempi for secular pieces:

Its proper seat is in truth the church, where it was meant to be used in choruses, fugues, and polyphonic pieces; but since the meter is now also used for other pieces, one must get used to it. But this makes it all the more necessary that in every case the tempo required by the piece, whether an aria, symphony, allegro, or concerto allegro, and so on, be indicated. Nevertheless, since the operas and symphonies have taken

## Example 1-2

Andante

2 Oboi  
2 Fagotti  
2 Corni in D  
Violino I  
Violino II  
Viola  
Donna Anna  
Violoncello & Contrabasso

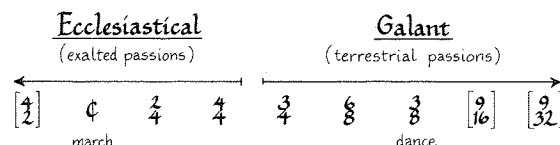
Or sai chi lo

no - re ra - pi - - - re'a me vol - se chi

over this meter, and it is often used for the fastest and most fiery pieces where its old dignity and seriousness have no place, it has almost taken on another character. For it is now as preeminently cherished in the galant style as it was previously venerated in the church style.<sup>31</sup>

Both eighteenth-century and modern confusions about the meter arise from a failure to attend to the quality of the beat rather than to the tempo marking, or to the notes which subdivide the beat.<sup>32</sup> The *alla breve* can appear in many notational guises and still retain its essential choreographic gesture. Neither the *Molto allegro* whole notes of the quartet nor the aria's busy-looking trappings of heavily decorated upbeats and string tremolos detract in performance from the measured yet stirring pace of the exalted march. In "Or sai chi l'onore" the gesture and affect of the *alla breve* have simply been transferred from their ecclesiastical sources into the domain of the *galant*, bearing their original associations with them; Donna Anna is a celestial heroine militant.

With the extremes of the spectrum of meters determined, we can make a rough sketch of its components. Triple meters represent the danceable passions, duple the passions closest to the divine:



The meters at the outermost extremes of the spectrum, those using whole-note and thirty-second-note beats, had dropped out of use, and are included here because they were mentioned as theoretical possibilities. Pulses of the practical extremes—half notes and sixteenth notes—were seldom made into measures which would be antithetical to their habitual affects: notes of long duration were rarely any more used in triple groupings (3/2), and sixteenth and eighth notes almost never in duple (4/16 and 4/8). Toward the middle of the spectrum usage grows more ambiguous, and one term may partake of the gestures of both extremes upon occasion: certainly some dances were written in duple meters, and in turn the generally frivolous 3/8<sup>33</sup> was sometimes used in an *affettuoso* style. In the middle of the spectrum stand 4/4 and 3/4, as the duple and triple meters of the *tempo giusto*. Both admit of slightly slower or faster tempi and more serious or more lighthearted affects, but they never shade into the radical solemnity of *alla breve* on the one hand, or the frivolity of 3/8 on the other.

The paradigmatic gestures of 4/4 are the humbler, "terrestrial" marches, and of 3/4, the minuet. The foot march provides a transition

from the exalted to the danceable passions. Dances are artful inventions requiring a meter susceptible to ornament; in triple meter the disproportion in the times allotted to upbeat and downbeat allows the dancer more room for an expansive step or gesture before the upbeat drives him on to the next measure, and the next step. Characteristic of the march and of duple meter, on the other hand, are the intensity and inevitability of the drive to the next step; the pedestrian alternation of right and left leaves no room for an expansive gesture, for the invented fantasy of the dancer. Most of the more complex rhythms which are habitually associated with the march—dotted rhythms, for example, at their most exaggerated in the French overture—are only elaborations of the upbeat impetus preparing for the next tread. In its intensity and singlemindedness the march is often anything but pedestrian, as "Or sai chi l'onore" demonstrates. Yet it can also be comically literal—a flat-footed imitation of the movements of the poor human body at its most unexalted. The few dances written in duple meter require a more distinctive rhythmic pattern than that of the march, a pattern which must be achieved by some manner of tinkering with the ordinary striding shape of the march's duple measure in order to make room for the unfolding of the dancer's movements.<sup>34</sup> The minuet, the danced counterpart of the march in the center of the spectrum, represents the most artful treatment of the normal human stride. In sum, the danceable takes its proper position to the right of the spectrum, in the company of the more modest, worldly passions, while exalted grief and anger soar from the left, in the tradition of the otherworldly.

### *Metrical Notation and the Contrast of Affects*

The rather dramatic reduction, by the latter half of the eighteenth century, in the number of meters which were actually in frequent use, may seem to have necessitated an attendant blunting of refinement in the expression of the various passions. Indeed, this reduction is often taken as proof of a severed connection between meter and expression which is assumed to be part of the "new aesthetics" of the Classic period. Kirnberger himself was certain that such was the case:

That these meters [2/8 and 6/16] and others . . . are considered today unnecessary and superfluous shows either that good and correct execution has been forgotten, or that a part of the expression which is easy to maintain only in these meters is completely unknown to us. Both do little credit to the art, which should in our time have ascended to its highest summit.<sup>35</sup>

In fact the reduction in meters had nothing to do with a weakening capacity for refined expression. It was rather the consequence of one of

the few true "revolutions" in habits of expression in the latter part of the century<sup>36</sup> — the enlistment of contrast as a compositional procedure. To abandon a particular notational sign does not of necessity mean to abandon the gesture it projects. Since Baroque composers generally allowed one spun-out affect to dominate an entire movement, they could choose a time signature which would notate that affect with precision. Classic composers began to shape each movement around several affects in order to dramatize the clarity of structure resulting from the newly emphasized polarity of tonic and dominant. The practice necessitated the choice of a flexible, chameleonlike time signature, harmonious not just with one affect but with a particular handful of them. Precision of notation was partially sacrificed in exchange for the freedom to play over a wide range of expressive gestures in one piece. The choice, for time signature, of a meter at one of the extremes of the spectrum (Kirnberger's "light gigue" in 9/16, for example, or the 9/4 which he considered an appropriate choice for church fugues<sup>37</sup>) would prohibit the inflection of a contrasting rhythmic gesture in the movement. Composers preferred to choose a metrical "lowest common denominator" for a time signature, avoiding the radical metrical extremes.

The contrasting gestures of the last movement of Mozart's G Major Quartet quoted earlier<sup>38</sup> would take on a different aspect if notated separately. The fugal section beginning the movement could be set more comfortably in an *Andante* 4/2 than in 4/4 *Molto allegro* (ex. 1-3). A time signature of 4/2 was not outside the bounds of Baroque practice,<sup>39</sup> and the four-beat measure fits the rhythmic shape of the fugue subject better than does 4/4, a meter which fractioned the subject into four whole-note measures. (The new notation does, however, make the syncopations of the countersubject slightly more difficult to read than they were in the original.) Mozart probably adopted the expedient of whole-note measures in order to avoid notating the quick contredanse which answers the fugue in sixteenth notes, where it would be difficult to distinguish from rapid and purely ornamental concerto-style passage work. The whole-note measure, almost a parody of the notation of Bach's motet-style fugue subjects, also lends the fugue an exaggerated vener-

Example 1-3



Example 1-4



Example 1-5



ability. Still the contredanse itself has to be improperly barred in order to dovetail with the fugue; it would ordinarily appear in 2/4 (ex. 1-4).

Toward the end of the exposition of the movement (m. 92), a third and cadential gesture appears, working on a rhythmic level midway between the fugue and the contredanse: it moves in quarter and half notes as opposed to the half and whole notes of the fugue and the eighth notes of the contredanse. A quasi-bourrée, with expanded upbeat, it helps to stabilize the rhythms of the movement, striking a *tempo giusto* between the *maestoso* fugue and the breakneck contredanse. In ordinary circumstances it would more likely be written with note values halved, two measures of the original compressed into one, and the barline shifted. The first violinist must ignore a few barlines if he is to superimpose the broad arch of the bourrée on the choppy succession of *alla breve* measures (ex. 1-5). The actual time signature of this movement is of little help to a performer who is ignorant of the individual configurations of each gesture: 4/4 suits all three topics at once by not quite suiting any of them. Although 4/4 is probably the best choice as a time signature for a movement with gestures on three rhythmic levels, it cannot in itself reflect the rhythmic richness of the movement. Its virtue is the purely negative one of noninterference.

The following example from a Classic *opera buffa* may help to illustrate the ways in which the neutral time signature can be manipulated in order to reflect various characters in an unfolding dramatic situation, and also, incidentally, to show how easy it can be to miss the point.



LEANDRO (TENOR)

ORCHESTRA  
(Str., 2 Ob., 2 Cor.)

Tu di - ra - i a Mar - i -

net - ta qual tor - men - to al cor io pro - vo qual tor -

men - to al cor io pro - vo - Do - ve

se - i? più non ti tro - vo, più non ti tro - vo!

Ob. added.

Cor. added

f

Cor. mark 1st beat

Cor.

Edward Dent, in his study of Mozart's operas (a book which, although often sketchy or off the mark in its analyses, provides more helpful background to the operas than any work in English which has appeared since Dent's second edition of 1946), analyzes an aria by Florian Gassmann as an example of mature *opera buffa* at the time when Mozart was beginning to compose operas. The aria occurs in the middle of a typical *buffa* intrigue: a master (Leandro) is instructing his servant (Carlotto) to carry messages to his beloved through her servant (Marinetta) when he discovers to his surprise that Carlotto has disappeared (ex. 1-6<sup>40</sup>). The aria is Leandro's, but Carlotto is lurking in the orchestra. While Leandro, intent on his own concerns, describes his amorous torments in a courtly bourrée style (mm. 2-9 in the vocal line), the orchestra is simultaneously choreographing Carlotto's motions, subdividing each quarter-note beat into a triplet, for a simple peasant gigue.<sup>41</sup> The skirling "scotch snaps" of the inattentive Carlotto's gigue melody mock the stock histrionics of Leandro's chromatic appoggiaturas on the words *tormento* and *provo* (mm. 5-6). When Leandro comes to himself and discovers Carlotto's disappearance, the gigue also vanishes, and Leandro assumes a martial bearing in his anger (mm. 9-14—a military march with horns and oboes added to the strings).

Even at its simplest, the *buffa* style has a genial wit and finesse, and is not without its subtleties. The "schizophrenic" dances which open this aria are not merely a description of the dramatic circumstances; they also manage to inject into the scene in subliminal fashion a suggestion of the conventional psychology of crafty servant and pompous master. Furthermore, as always in good *buffa* writing, the action confirms the harmonic arch of the key-area plan:<sup>42</sup> Leandro's angry march occurs at the arrival on the dominant—a harmonic move which requires both new musical energy and a consolidation of topical resources if it is to be made fully dramatic. And, reflexively, the move up a fifth mimes Leandro's coming to consciousness. If a director is aware of the topical variety in this apparently one-dimensional aria, he can exploit it cleverly on the stage. But to someone ignorant of the interplay of topics (as indeed is Dent himself in his analysis), there would seem to be little reason to prize the aria. It has no melody to speak of, nor is its harmony or orchestration particularly inventive. All Gassmann's skills as a *buffa* craftsman are engaged in making of this text a comic *scena* for three participants: singer, orchestra, and mime (the silent Carlotto).

#### *Practical Musicians and the Vocabulary of Expression*

Late eighteenth-century musicians differed in another way from their counterparts earlier in the century: they had learned to distrust attempts to concoct "cookbooks" of metrical gestures containing recipes

for the expression of the passions. J. A. Hiller in his singing treatise published in 1774 expressed this distrust in a satirical paragraph about the obsession of his predecessors with classification:

If anyone wants more divisions of style, or modes of writing, he can gain rich gleanings from *Walther's* musical *Lexikon* in the article *Stylus*. *Rousseau* himself dipped into this little work. Our dear forefathers never lacked for classifications, and if they sometimes strayed into another compartment, still there was no end to the classifying. Thus they fared with style. Everything we comprehend under the expression and character of a piece, they would include under style. They had a merry, a sharp, an expressive, an honest, a tender, a moving, even a base and cringing style. It was not enough for them to assume a special *Stylus Choraicus* for dance pieces; these still had to be subdivided into as many special styles as there were kinds of dances. They had the sarabande-minuet-passepied-gavotte-rigaudon-gaillard-courante-style. Other classifications of style, into the noble, middle, and low, into the serious and the comic, into the artificial and the natural, into the swollen and the flowing, appear to have somewhat more in them, and would deserve a closer examination if I did not fear it would be too detailed, and if the singer had to be as well-grounded in them as the composer.<sup>43</sup>

For this reason it is vain to search in Classic manuals of composition for prescriptions of the *Affektenlehre* sort. Most writers preferred to discuss a few universal principles pertaining to the passions and their proper mode of expression, and then to leave all decisions about particulars to the composer's good taste. Breaches of taste, however, did not go unobserved, especially in opera, where the text provided a standard of criticism. So, for example, Thomas Busby, studying the music of Handel, could fault the composer for the misuse of a dance topic in *Alexander's Feast*,<sup>44</sup> and a French writer could be sharply critical of Jommelli's application of the same dance.<sup>45</sup> But composers were expected to avoid the pitfalls of bad taste armed merely with such negative examples.

The Classic distaste for codification and the concurrent simplifications of metrical notation held real dangers for the musical illiterate. Good taste was still considered to be not a matter of individual caprice, but a faculty opposed to whimsy; it could be accounted for, and must be educated. As Quantz put it,

Music, then, is an art that must be judged not by personal whims, but by certain rules, like the other fine arts, and by good taste acquired and refined through extensive experience and practice.<sup>46</sup>

Practical musicians were seriously concerned lest with the new movement away from prescription they raise a generation of young composers and performers ignorant of the expressive values of rhythmic shapes. "The retention or realization of a *Charakter*," warned Koch, "is one of

the most important requirements of all musical compositions."<sup>47</sup> The practice of appending a qualifying adjective to a movement became widespread in the period probably as a means of suggesting at least approximate sets of tempo limits for performers who lacked training in the art of reading a movement's rhythmic gestures. Reluctant, however, to rely on these ambiguous directions, teachers chose to instruct their pupils in the recognition of the various expressive gestures, and used the social dances, the *danses caractéristiques*, as a primer for their study. There young musicians could examine the gestures in their natural habitat; Mozart spent his early training as a composer writing sample minuets, gigue, and marches. As Kirnberger put it:

Every beginner who wants to be well grounded in composition is well advised to make himself familiar with the organization of all forms of the dance, because in them all kinds of character and of rhythm appear and are most precisely executed. If he has no fluency in these characteristic pieces, it is not at all possible for him to give to a piece a particular character.<sup>48</sup>

Pupils beginning the study of music with characterless pieces would flounder hopelessly, as an amusing piece of dialogue makes clear:

*Disciple*. Come, Sir, let us play a tune.

*Master*. A tune! There is one: play it.

*Dis*. How do you call it?

*Ma*. I do not know.

*Dis*. Nor I neither.

*Friend*. Bravo! again: let me look at it — It is a Gavot: Your Gavots have been condemned, from time immemorial, to be crucified by beginners.

*Ma*. And was it with a Gavot your ward began?

*Friend*. Exactly; a March, and then a Gavot, and then a Vauxhall Song, and then a bit from *Felton's* Lessons, and then Adagios, Andantes, Allegros, and various other things.

*Ma*. . . . Strange foundations for lessons for the harpsichord!

*Friend*. Better begin with those than with a tune of which we cannot tell the name.

*Ma*. And who is the ignoramus that does that?

*Friend*. Yourself.

*Ma*. I! who told you so?

*Friend*. Why I saw it, heard it this instant.<sup>49</sup>

Classic musicians' aversion to overliteral codification must not be taken as evidence of an aesthetic of the "abstract" and "nonreferential" nature of music. Their music was indissolubly wedded to the human pulse beat, breath, and stride, shaped into an artful measure by meter. A

consciousness of the proper articulations of the rhythmic gestures in Mozart's music makes the difference between lifelessness and liveliness in performance. Furthermore, knowledge of the affective limits of each gesture ensures a clearer notion of what Mozart was about when he employed them in the operas. Since the social dances constitute a considerable portion of Mozart's expressive vocabulary, the next chapter is devoted to their consideration.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *The Gestures of Social Dance*

#### *Habits in the Dance Hall*

Most of the dances whose characteristic patterns form part of Mozart's vocabulary of rhythmic gestures were already old-fashioned in his own time. New tastes prevailed among the bourgeoisie who frequented the new and modish dance halls; except for the minuet, the French court dances were rarely performed in public. Most of the dancing manuals written in the latter half of the century contained instructions only for the minuet and contredanse, and this pair of contrasting dances, the one reserved and the other exuberant, constituted the evening's exercises. The reason for the selection, as one dancing master explained it, was the preference of the new class of amateur dancers for dances requiring little skill and involving the greatest pleasure for the greatest number:

In earlier times, before taste in the true beauties of dancing was refined, because of an excessive emulation of the French, no man was considered a skilled dancer who could not dance an *aimable Vainqueur*, *charmant Vainqueur*, *Passepied*, *dance d'Anjou*, *Princesse bourée* [*sic*], *Courante*, *Rigaudon*, *Cavotte* [*sic*], *Sarabande*, or *Gigue* [*sic*]. People realized later that such dances were too theatrical for society, and hindered the common pleasure. Therefore they danced *Menuets* and English dances, which gave the kind of pleasure in which an entire group could participate.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, Classic composers of symphonies and chamber music were faithfully reflecting the activities of the dance hall when they coupled in the last two movements of their works the rhythms of the minuet and